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CIA recruits more, prof says

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The CIA has increased its covert recruiting activities among faculty and foreign students at Stanford, according to an engineering professor who said he and others have been approached by a CIA agent.

Professor Bernard Roth, an expert on robots, said he was approached "subtly" by a CIA agent and since has learned that several other professors have been contacted by the CIA.

Roth recently was involved in a flap with the U.S. State Department over restrictions placed on the visit of a Soviet robot expert. When Stanford refused to abide by the restrictions, the State Department ordered the National Academy of Sciences to cancel the Stanford trip.

"There is no contract to sign, but I sense there is an escalation of this business," Roth, who teaches mechanical engineering, said Tuesday.

CIA spokesman Dale Peterson, contacted in Washington, said his agency "does have the responsibility to collect foreign intelligence in the United States. We do make contact with individuals who do voluntarily want to provide" the CIA with information.

"This is not unusual. We've been doing it 25 years or more," Peterson said.

Roth said "the recruiting is subtly done."

In the past, he said, the FBI regularly contacted professors who worked with foreign students. Agents would contact the professor before, during and after the visit, according to Roth.

"This time, the CIA came," he said. He said a woman from the San Francisco CIA office, who apparently has the Stanford "beat" came to his office.

"We had a nice conversation. She doesn't look like '007,'" he said.

During the course of the talk, Roth said, he noticed statements "which I interpreted as, 'I'm being recruited.'"

For example, he said, the CIA may have been offering him money to travel to foreign meetings.

Roth said, however, that the statements never were clear-cut and always contained "a level of ambiguity."

He speculated that the CIA might be interested in contacting Stanford professors in the search for foreign students who might be willing to return to their homelands and spy for the agency.

Another way for university researchers to help the agency, he said, would be to get information about foreign researchers for the CIA. A professor could be assigned to go to an overseas meeting to find out, for example, which of three Soviet scientists is heading a particular research operation.

Roth said he also noticed that his CIA contact appeared to have extensive knowledge of who was conducting which research projects on campus, which led him to believe that the agency's activities on campus were increasing.

CIA spokesman Peterson said, however, "I can't quantify whether we're doing more than in the past."

"Thousands in the United States provide information to us... academics, businessmen, persons from virtually every walk of life," Peterson added.

He said the information is compiled and given to government officials. "Tell your readers we're trying to do our job," Peterson said.

Stanford requires faculty members holding CIA grants for research to report them to university officials.

Stanford spokesman Bob Beyers said the university long has allowed the CIA to recruit students openly.

David Abernethy, president of the university's faculty senate and a political science professor, said the issue was not scheduled for the group's next meeting Thursday afternoon, but faculty members have an opportunity to raise issues from the floor.

"My sense is there is Senate support for (university president Donald) Kennedy's position" in battling the State and Commerce departments' rules on foreign visitors, because that issue involves "what it means to have a free and open campus," Abernethy said.

The issue of covert CIA recruitment on campus, however, will be "difficult (for the faculty senate) to discuss, because, by definition, the actors in this situation are covert," he said.